

PART IV

**ARIZONA WILLOW
CONSERVATION STRATEGIES BY
MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

D. Arizona Game and Fish Department

THE STATE



OF ARIZONA

GAME & FISH DEPARTMENT

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Deputy Director
Thomas W. Spalding

March 3, 1995

Mr. Sam Spiller, Field Supervisor
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Arizona Ecological Services Field Office
2321 West Royal Palm Road, Suite 103
Phoenix, Arizona 85021-4951

Dear Mr. Spiller:

Please find attached our "Conservation Strategies for the Arizona Willow Conservation Agreement." Our proposed strategies represent a firm commitment. Our Department is a committed partner in the conservation of Arizona's candidate species.

I would like the opportunity to meet with you and to discuss reoccurring issues involving the Federal Advisory Committee Act. In my view, the State should always be included as a signatory to Conservation Agreements. Further, it has always been my understanding that the states retain full management authority for all species not listed or proposed for listing under Section 4 of the Endangered Species Act.

Please contact me at your earliest opportunity. I look forward to resolving these issues with you in the very near future.

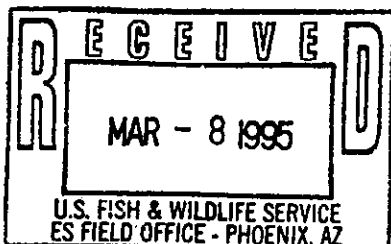
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Duane L. Shroufe".

Duane L. Shroufe
Director

DLS:jb

cc: Mollie Beaty, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Charles Cartwright, Regional Forester
Lynn Starnes, Acting Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT - CONSERVATION STRATEGIES
FOR THE
ARIZONA WILLOW CONSERVATION AGREEMENT**

INTRODUCTION

The Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) is responsible for population management of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife species in Arizona. In addition to this responsibility, the Department's mission is "to conserve, enhance, and restore Arizona's diverse wildlife resources and habitats through aggressive protection and management programs". Consequently, the Department has a strong commitment toward the restoration and enhancement of sensitive riparian habitats which contain Arizona willow populations through an ecosystem approach.

The stream and riparian habitats which support Arizona willow populations on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (ASNF) also provide important habitat for numerous terrestrial and aquatic wildlife species. These habitats are of key importance for sensitive species such as the Arizona trout (federally - "Threatened"), northern water shrew, and meadow jumping mouse, as well as game species such as elk, deer, and turkey. Management that will improve the health and sustainability of the riparian and adjacent upland ecosystems will enhance conditions for all of these species.

Herbivory of Arizona willow plants by wildlife, particularly elk, has been identified as a threat to the health of the plant depending upon the timing and intensity of use. Individual plants and populations of Arizona willow can be adversely impacted if browsing use of the species is excessive, particularly through the removal of regenerative plant parts (e.g., flowers, seeds, and seedlings), and during critical growth periods (e.g., spring).

Since the potential effects of elk browsing on Arizona willow have been highlighted as a primary wildlife related concern, the conservation strategies identified in this document will focus on elk management. Elk in AGFD - Region I (Pinetop) are managed under the overall population objectives identified in the Region I - "Elk Operational Plan" which tiers to the statewide "Arizona Big Game Strategic Plan. Arizona willow populations on the ASNF are predominantly found within the "Greer/Greens Peak" elk management unit which is identified in the operational plan. It has been determined through recent elk telemetry information that more extensive movement of elk occurs than was first suspected among the elk herd management units (i.e., Greer/Greens Peak, Black River, Milligan Valley) near Arizona willow habitats. Thus, some elk from each of the management units may seasonally utilize riparian habitats where Arizona willow is found. Currently, the elk population management objectives for these three management units are to stabilize elk population density in each unit. Elk

population numbers in these units have been reduced approximately 32 percent (%) through antlerless hunting since 1991. During this same period antlerless elk permits increased for these management units from 120 to 1325 (a 1104% increase).

CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

1. The AGFD is committed to actively participating with the USFS, USFWS, and other interested parties in the development and implementation of monitoring and research activities to determine the effects of wildlife and livestock herbivory on Arizona willow populations and sensitive riparian habitats.
2. The AGFD is committed to aggressively managing elk populations in the elk herd management units (i.e., Greer/Greens Peak, Black River, Milligan Valley) which may affect Arizona willow populations consistent with monitoring and research information. This strategy will include the current stabilization of elk populations in the Greer/Greens Peak, Black River, and Milligan Valley management units. Future population reductions can be implemented when determined necessary based on sound cooperative monitoring and research information.
3. The AGFD is committed to annually updating and revising the Region I - Elk Operational Plan population management objectives for elk management units which contain Arizona willow populations to respond to Arizona willow management concerns.
4. The AGFD is committed to pursuing potential funding sources which may be needed to protect and enhance Arizona willow populations in conjunction with other sensitive stream/riparian species (e.g., Arizona trout) and habitat management activities. For example, this may include funding through Heritage "special use permit" fencing in conjunction with Arizona trout habitat protection, Heritage Stewardship projects (e.g., water shrew habitat enhancement), and other projects.
5. The AGFD is committed in protecting sensitive habitats and species such as the Arizona willow through its September 1993 Cooperative Agreement with the USFS. In this agreement, the Department through its purchase of the White Mountain Hereford Ranch and associated Rudd Creek Allotment waived the Rudd Creek Allotment back to the USFS to provide the ASNF flexibility for livestock management in addressing sensitive species and habitat issues. This has enabled the ASNF, for example, to rest the Lee Valley and Voight pastures on the Voight Allotment from livestock grazing for the past two years with minimal economic impact to the livestock permittee. These pastures contain over 90% of the Arizona willow populations found on the ASNF.